

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Reconsideration of the application is respectfully requested.

I. Status of the Claims

Claim 2 was previously cancelled.

Claims 3-5, 13-19, 21 and 22 are cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer of the subject matter therein.

Claims 1, 6, 7, 12 and 20 are amended without the introduction of new matter.

Claims 23-26 are added without the introduction of new matter.

Claims 1, 6-12, 20 and 23-26 are pending.

II. Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 102/103

Claim 1 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102 (b) as anticipated by Osborn, III et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,885,265, hereinafter, "Osborn"). Claims 10 and 11 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102 (b) as anticipated by Osborn, III (International Application Publication No. WO 99/26573, hereinafter "Osborn '573").

Further, claims 3-7, 13-16 and 20-22 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 (a) as unpatentable over Osborn in view of Evers (U.S. Patent No. 5,300,358). Claims 8 and 9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 (a) as unpatentable over Osborn in view of Osborn '573. Claim 12 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 (a) as unpatentable over Osborn and Osborn '573, and further in view of Evers. Claims 17-19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 (a) as unpatentable over Osborn and Evers, and further in view of Osborn '573.

The rejections of claims 3-5, 13-19, 21 and 22 are moot because those claims are canceled by the present response as noted above. Applicants respectfully traverse the above-noted rejections of claims 1, 6-12, 20 and 23-26.

Independent claim 1 is directed to an interlabial pad, amended to incorporate features substantially similar to those recited in previously presented claims 3-5, and further amended to clarify subject matter recited. Specifically, amended claim 1 now includes the features as follows.

- at least one seam part formed by overlapping the plurality of sheet pieces over one another, the seam part including
 - a longitudinal seam part extending in a longitudinal direction of the interlabial pad, crossing over the back side sheet from an edge to another edge of the back face side sheet, and
 - an adhesive agent applied between the sheet piece and the another sheet piece at the longitudinal seam part along the longitudinal central line,

- wherein the sheet piece, which overlaps the another sheet piece at the longitudinal seam part and which covers a side closer to a longitudinal central line of the interlabial pad, is positioned at the absorbent body side of the back side sheet,

- wherein the sheet pieces overlap with each other over a range of 5 to 15 mm to form the longitudinal seam part, and

- wherein the surface side sheet and the back face side sheet are joined at a peripheral edge of the absorbent body.

Accordingly, the seam part as recited in amended claim 1 is formed by overlapping the plurality of sheet pieces over one another. The sheet pieces overlap with each other over a range of 5 to 15 mm to form the longitudinal seam part. Thus, the seam part is not the entire back face side sheet, and the back face side sheet is not entirely the overlapping region.

Further, as described in the Specification at page 3, lines 14-25, because the interlabial pad recited in amended claim 1 has the seam part with the adhesive agent applied between the two sheet pieces, which overlap each other, at the longitudinal seam part along longitudinal central line, the interlabial pad is not dissolved by menstrual blood, but dissolves in water after use. Therefore, the back face side sheet of the interlabial pad separates effectively into at least two sheet pieces, and, then, dissolves in water.

The cited references of Osborn, Osborn '573 and Evers do not teach or suggest, either taken individually or in combination, at least the above-noted features as recited in amended claim 1.

The Examiner asserts that "Osborn's parting zone is interpreted to be the entire backsheet because the backsheet itself is cold water dispersible, not just the edge seams" in the Response to Arguments in the outstanding Office Action. However, the Examiner recognizes that "Osborn does not teach a parting zone that is a seam crossing from one edge to an opposite edge,"¹ and combines Evers with Osborn to supplement such deficiency of Osborn. With respect to Evers, the Examiner also states that "'seam' is interpreted as the entire overlapping region."

In this regard, the Examiner states that, "[a]s water starts to dissolve the back sheet, it breaks up into smaller pieces."² However, because the "seam part" is the entire back sheet in Osborn and Evers, the back sheet does not separate effectively into plural sheet pieces before it dissolves in water. Further, unlike the adhesive agent provided at the longitudinal seam part in the interlabial pad recited in amended claim 1, the absorbent structure in Evers is provided with an adhesive mist between the back sheets. The entire overlapping of the back sheets prepared in such manner causes

¹ See the outstanding Office Action at page 5, lines 6-8.

² See the outstanding Office Action at page 10, the fifth line from the bottom.

stiffness that leads to discomfort during the insertion of the absorbent structure between labia, and also to ineffective dissolution in water.

Similarly, Osborn '573 does not disclose the features recited in amended claim 1 to the extent discussed above. Therefore, even if the teachings of the cited references are combined, the combined teachings of the cited references fail to teach or suggest the present invention recited in amended claim 1. Accordingly, amended claim 1 and claims dependent therefrom are patentably distinguishable over Osborn, Osborn '573 and Evers, either taken individually or in combination.

Claim 20, dependent from amended claim 1, is further patentably distinguishable over the cited references because claim 20 recites that the back face side sheet is made uneven at least at the surface opposite to the absorbent body side. Such features of the present invention are described in the Specification at page 18, line 3 to page 19, line 1 as follows.

The outer surface 30s of the back face side sheet 30 is preferably made uneven. The outer surface 30s may be made uneven by an emboss process, and the unevenness may also be formed by adhering a nonwoven fabric to the outer surface 30s and confounding the fibers of the fabric. When the outer surface 30s is made uneven, after the interlabial pad is discarded into a toilet, water will enter readily between the mutually opposing parts of the back face side sheet 30 that is folded in two during use. In particular, in the case where a nonwoven fabric is adhered onto the outer surface 30s and a hydrophilic nonwoven fabric is used, the water of the toilet will be absorbed rapidly upon discarding into a toilet. Water will thus enter between the small sheet pieces 30a and 30b that overlap at the longitudinal seam part 90 and the back face side sheet 30 will disintegrate readily along the longitudinal seam part 90 and become dispersed as the plurality of small sheet pieces.

In order to facilitate the dispersal of the back face side sheet 30 of a used interlabial pad 10 that is discarded into a toilet, in addition to making the outer surface 30s uneven, perforation-like slits may be formed in the small sheet piece 30a, which is positioned at the side (hereinafter referred to as the "outer side") opposite to the absorbent

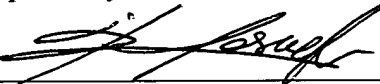
CONCLUSION

In view of the above amendments, Applicants believe the pending application is in condition for allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to pass this application to issue.

The Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number indicated below once he has reviewed the proposed amendment if the Examiner believes any issue can be resolved through either a Supplemental Response or an Examiner's Amendment.

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Respectfully submitted,

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